

**AMESBURY PLANNING BOARD  
CITY HALL AUDITORIUM, 62 FRIEND STREET  
Monday, February 25, 2013**

**Meeting called to order at 7:12 P.M.**

**PRESENT: Howard Dalton (Chair), Stephen Dunford, David Dragonas, Ted Semesnyei, Karen Solstad, Ara Sanentz.**

**ABSENT: David Frick**

**ALSO PRESENT: Nipun Jain, City Planner, Paul Bibaud, Recording Secretary**

**MINUTES: All minutes continued to March 11 meeting**

November 26, 2012

December 17, 2012

January 14, 2012

January 28, 2012

February 11, 2012

**SIGN APPLICATION:**

**SmartMart Auto – 41 Hillside Avenue**

No applicant or representative was present on this matter. Continued to March 11.

**PRE-APPLICATION CONFERENCE:**

**Amesbury Animal Hospital – 277 Elm Street**

**Nipun Jain:** Continued from prior meetings. The site plan had been provided to the Planning Board. Conceptual architectural drawings were provided at the last meeting for the board's consideration. The inclement weather has not allowed us to set up a site visit, so we recommended to the applicant that we wrap up the pre application conference and for the board to supply any significant comments at this time, so that they can continue to move forward on the project development phase and to make the application, as the zoning change for this project has been endorsed by municipal council.

**Fred Ford, Cammett Engineering,** representing the applicant, stated that what we want to accomplish tonight is to identify any outstanding questions / issues that the Planning Board would like us to address, we'd like to move forward with our final site design plans and move ahead with a final site plan application. More detailed architectural plans will come in with the site plan application.

**Howard Dalton:** Where you have the major entrance to the hotel, could the design be set up so that at a later date, it could connect to that road rather than come out onto Elm Street, so we don't have multiple entrances coming onto Elm Street.

**Fred Ford:** Some of the master plans we've done for Herb Sears for the golden triangle have the main entrance in alignment with where the hotel entrance is proposed, which is about 400 -500 feet coming back toward the east. I'm not sure that can be done, and what other issues might be involved in such a plan. As it is, this entrance will be directly across from the retail outlet. The intent was to align those two entrances, so it wouldn't be offset.

**Stephen Dunford:** Since we've been snowed out of site visits, it would be nice to reschedule that.

**Nipun Jain:** We can always do that, moving towards better weather. Part of the reason for pre application conferences is to identify if there are serious concerns by the Planning Board as it relates to parking, access, building layout, how the building is located in relation to the parking on the site. Most of the development or limit of work is in the areas where there are already existing buildings. So when you go to the site, what you see is that those areas are already developed or disturbed. They have moved the building closer to Elm Street, which has eliminated the need for clearing more in the back at this time. The general location of the building and parking with regards to the site are more or less appropriate. The building can't get closer to the road, because you have to meet the setback. The parking is equally well placed, as the board recommends. It is well located regarding traffic circulation. When the application is submitted, that circulation will be presented in further detail. With those three primary issues being fairly well resolved, the applicant should be directed to further develop this, so that they can make application. Storm water issues will come into play when they have more detailed design. If the design can stay out of the buffer zones, this plan may not have to go before ConCom. It looks like there would be minimal impact. We can schedule a site visit in 3-4 weeks, hopefully with less snow on the ground.

**Fred Ford:** Also, on the conceptual site plan from the architect, it shows parking to the rear of the building, close to abutting property. We moved that parking further away from the residential.

**Karen Solstad:** That was one question I had. Also, on the first conceptual site plan there was talk of a building, then adding on. Is that still the plan?

**Fred Ford:** As of now, the building is only going to be about 7000 square feet, whereas originally it was submitted to be 12,000 square feet over a two story building. It's been scaled back. There are a couple dashed figures on the outside corner of the building that could be sites for future additions, but not at this time.

**Ted Semesnyei:** There was talk about storm water issues with the hotel site. I know it's early, but is there anticipation regarding those issues?

**Fred Ford:** We're looking at really good sandy soils here with a fairly deep water table. So we're looking to probably install vegetated swales and open infiltration basin, thus avoiding the need for underground storage, etc. It should be a good opportunity for an L.I.D. type storm water design. Soil tests all show sandy soil, so a storm water design will be fairly easy with very few issues.

**Nipun Jain:** Remember that this is a discussion to assist the applicant to make application. There will be a public hearing, more detailed information coming to the board, along with technical and peer reviews as well. So it is at the point where it should move forward so they can start working on those.

**Fred Ford:** One thing I'll need to know is, what level of detail would you want to see? Can we just supplement the information we already have, or do you want trip generation data, rather than another full blown traffic analysis of Elm Street.

**Nipun Jain:** Traffic study usually involves setting up all the calculations, field surveys to determine how many cars are going by. It's the same corridor, the same traffic, because no other development has taken place, so it is most likely to generate the same data. The only thing that may change slightly is what the analysis is, because traffic would be turning right instead of left for this project. So I don't see the need for starting from scratch. Their engineer can verify that

data, which was three years ago, and confirm from their professional perspective, if they see any change. It has to improve because of how the intersection along Route 110 has been changed and improved. So a supplement will be fine.

**Fred Ford:** The mechanicals will be going in the attic. Exterior building materials has not been finalized.

**Motion** by David Dragonas that, with the pre application, we recommend that the applicant move forward with the application. Motion was seconded by Stephen Dunford. Vote was unanimous.

## **CONTINUED PUBLIC HEARINGS:**

### **Special Permit – Wetland and Floodplain**

**60 Pleasant Valley Road (Corey)** Continued to the March 11 meeting

## **SITE PLAN REVIEW**

### **17-19 SCHOOL STREET- FIRE STATION**

**Nipun Jain:** This is a continued hearing on the site plan review for 17-19 School Street, the fire station. At the last meeting, the Planning Board requested a review of certain aspects of the project, and the applicant submitted revised information by a set of plans and accompanying documents, essentially four or five items: one was relative to the chain link fence proposed around the parking, the landscaping along the building, and parking off of School Street, the sidewalk along the building from School Street to the new entrance, comment about the lighting for pedestrians, and the request for floor plans. Your packets should have documents addressing all of those issues.

**Pieter Hartford,** project manager: With me tonight is Chief Jon Brickett and also Dennis Gray of Gray Architects. I just passed out to the board a blow up of the sidewalk which shows in better detail what we've done for the proposed sidewalk layout, per your comments. We realigned it so it comes off School Street on its own and bend towards the building, with a curb there to allow us to maintain the grade of the existing soil and create the walk we need to provide handicap access from the sidewalk on School Street. We left the front area as grass, but then as we get to the existing building, we transition to day lilies, then we have hosta proposed for the grassy back area. We are providing two light sources to provide lighting to the walkway coming off School Street. We also pulled the walk away from the building by about a foot, to address the issue of falling icicles / snow from the building. We wanted to maintain handicap access on both ends of the walk. We submitted a copy of a parking plan submitted several years ago for a municipal parking lot. Our project is consistent with this plan. Since the DPW has relocated along with the senior center moved to Elm Street, parking is no longer needed at Ordway. Once the addition is complete and the trailer behind the fire station now is removed, that we will restore parking spots taken up by that trailer. Employee or emergency vehicle parking can resume there once the trailer is removed. Additional employee parking would overflow into the church parking lot, consistent with what is done now with city hall, police, and fire station staff. With respect to interior plans, I believe we've distributed plans for first and second floors. First floor addition includes a gear locker room, the fire chief's office, deputy fire chief and the EMS deputy, as well as a conference room. Within the confines of the existing building, we are creating a receptionist space, as well as a handicap accessible bathroom provided there, in the existing building footprint now. The second floor is refurbished area from before, specifically bunk rooms for fire

staff as well as kitchen and living area that they had previously. As opposed to the unattractive chain link fencing, we propose the same metal ornamental fence that exists in front of the police station. The small tree towards the corner of the fire station will need removing. The grass space coming to that area should have shrubbery or another small tree to dress up the nice space. A discussion ensued regarding the tight, pinch point parking along the side of the Ordway. The parking commission working with the fire department, in tandem with the mayor's office would be the ones to look at alternative parking plans to create better parking efficiencies. It was suggested that, rather than go with no directional signage, to place a small sign next to the sidewalk off of School Street that directs people to the new main entrance. Also provide an overhang at the entrance to the new addition, especially for handicap protection in weather. An award of this contract, at the earliest, would come probably by late July / early August, and try to demolish the Annex, then have the contractor do much of the renovation on the second floor, as well as addressing the roof, so we can move the fire station staff back into the building. Then we'd remove the trailer, to provide the space to do the addition. It's a two-phased approach...interior work then the addition. Hopefully, staff is settled before next winter.

**Howard Dalton:** So we'll hear a motion to close the public hearing, and at the next meeting, you can submit the canopy design, let us know about the signage, and what minor landscaping we talked about will look like, and we'll approve it next meeting.

**Motion** by David Dragonas to close the public hearing. Motion was seconded by Ara Sanentz. Vote was unanimous.

**Nipun Jain:** It will all be administrative from here.

**SITE PLAN REVIEW- SUMMIT AT BAILEYS POND** Continued to the March 11 meeting.

#### **AFFORDABLE HOUSING STUDY: UPDATE ON CURRENT PLANNED PRODUCTION PLAN AND STRATEGIES FOR CREATION OF AFFORDABLE HOUSING**

**Nipun Jain:** The next step is that this becomes the final document that goes to the city council, who would recommend this to the state for approval, the state reviews it, may have suggestions for revisions, and then the city adopts it.

**Ted Semesnyei:** I do have a number of comments and questions before I could endorse this. My overall thought is I didn't get a sense as to whether this was a plan specifically for affordable housing, or is it something that is meant to address broader issues related to housing. At a minimum, at the beginning I think there should be more information setting the reader up as to the exact purpose of what the housing production plan is. There is a brief introduction then it goes into quite a bit of data. I never got the sense for what the purpose of this plan is.

**Nipun Jain:** What we'll do is add the summary of the statute under which the housing production plan is required, which in summary is: a city in Massachusetts should have a long term plan to create affordable housing as well as meet the housing needs of it's population as it grows. So it's not just the affordability component, but what is the plan for providing housing for the residents to keep pace with the changing population.

**Ted Semesnyei:** That explanation gets lost in here, in terms of figuring out if it is just for affordable housing, or if it is for broader purposes in addressing the housing needs of the general city as a whole. The sense I got was it is very heavy on data. I felt there were some ideas on what to do, but in a number of areas, I felt it doesn't really lay out exactly how to do those ideas.

**Nipun Jain:** Part of the policy statement is to outline what the goals are. How you get there is an action plan. It has been sketched, but it's not been fine tuned. The goal helps the city navigate as opportunities arise. The data itself might change, in terms of population, demographics, what kind of housing is produced over the short term, what 40B's get built and what do not. Get built. So how we get there is a very dynamic plan. It does outline strategies as to how to achieve those goals, but that is what they are. They are strategies. More fine tuned action plans would come about as we look at each strategy and decide the best approach to achieve it.

**Ted Semesnyei:** Is the city's thinking that the fine tuned action plans, more layout, how to actually achieve some of these things, is that something that is not appropriate with the affordable housing plan, is it something that tells us the master plan should be revisited soon, is it something that should be pushed off for the master plan process, which has a big housing component?

**Nipun Jain:** For example, the first strategy is: Affordable housing production through development. So we need to produce affordable housing, one of the ways is through development. So we identify sites most appropriate for low income housing. If we had an action plan for that strategy, it would be to map all of the vacant properties. Another thing would be to map all the properties that are suitable for redevelopment. But that exercise is what this plan asks the city to do. It would not be fair to start outlining all the action steps to go through that strategy and achieve a goal in this plan. This is sort of a master plan for housing. This plan is to identify core strategies to be developed later on.

**Ted Semesnyei:** When you say "to be developed later on," what vehicle do they get developed? Is that strictly internal for the planning department and mayor's office to figure out, or is there any vehicle for the public to be able to weigh in with input for the action plan to help realize some of these goals and strategies?

**Nipun Jain:** It is up to the executive branch to determine what would be the vehicle going forward that5 keeps track of it...by default the planning office becomes the agency that leads the charge in being the advocate for what needs to be done, what opportunities are out there. Also there is one more vehicle, which is the affordable housing trust, which the city council adopted. So we anticipate that this trust will be a group of local residents, professionals from the community, real estate and social services. They'd have a feel for what needs are coming about, and they'd use this document as a guiding factor.

**Ted Semesnyei:** The affordable housing trust is not explained in here. Is that something that is mentioned, but the actual workings of it as to how it will work for Amesbury, is that to be figured out going forward?

**Nipun Jain:** That is one vehicle to take this plan from just being a plan to being a working document, then identifying what little steps that the city needs to take in order to achieve these goals and objectives. Maybe other vehicles would develop, like applying for a grant, allowing us to hire a consultant, to take one strategy and develop it further.

**Stephen Dunford:** Would it be prudent to recommend it go forward with an executive summary and a description saying that this is a plan and not an implementation guide?

**Nipun Jain:** Sure.

**Karen Solstad:** It almost seems more like a state of some things that have happened, like this is where we were in 2000, this is where we were in 2010. It seems more like it is a "this is where we were, this is where we are, this is where we want to be."

**Stephen Dunford:** It's both a gap / capabilities analysis, but it's also, in section 3, strategies, or a plan for how to get there. That's the basis for future analysis of alternatives. We don't want to

do that here. We want to narrow down the different approaches you want, then put that into complete detail. That's not going to be done here.

So yes, it states where we were, where we are now, and where we would like to go, maybe. Then the strategies are how to get there.

**Nipun Jain:** Page 4, under introduction, shows 5 bullets that outlines what the housing production plan is about.

**Karen Solstad:** Those are bare skeletons of bullets. I think that if the introduction framed the rest of the document, maybe there could be more meat to the 5 bullets. Also, the document feels very awkward, as if hurried. It needs cleaning up regarding proper English writing.

**Ted Semesnyei:** On table 12, page 15, the data doesn't add up.

**Howard Dalton:** Since the first 5 year plan was in 2006, and the next one was due in 2011, and you've been working on it because all the data was new in 2011. You're asking the state to let you update the plan, but they may ask for a full blown new plan. Other than checking the facts, what does the state want, versus what we think the state wants?

**Nipun Jain:** The state wants the city to have a plan for the next 5 years to produce ten percent of the total housing stock as affordable housing. That is the primary objective. Also, what is the path that the city has laid out for moving towards that goal. What we've experienced is that there are always some comments from the state. That narrows the field if you have to address it. We can make changes for comments that the board and the council might have, but if we don't set this thing in motion, we'll never get that limited set of comments from the state.

**Ted Semesnyei:** There was a lot of work, research and data in putting this together, and at the end, there is a list of strategies and goals that the community could pursue, but I don't see how that link was made between the data and how goals and strategies were decided upon. I'm not seeing that there was a process there. Then, there is no hashing out some examples of achieving some goals and objectives. We're wanting to be at 10 % affordable housing, yet throughout the document, there's a number of times it is mentioned " incrementally trying to achieve that" through adding some affordable housing here and there throughout the community, which is one incremental step of strategy. Or, there is also a strategy of aggressively promoting the 40R on Route 110, which in one shot would push us over the 10 % if that were developed, which according to the data in here, that would be over 200 units.

**Nipun Jain:** But that is not a public project, it is a privately owned property and private project. We can provide incentives to the developer, but we cannot do the marketing.

**Ted Semesnyei:** To me, that's one of the discussions that could be had is "what would be preferable for Amesbury. "Would it be best to try to facilitate something like that and promote that, and if it comes to fruition, what does that mean to the community in terms of having all that concentrated in one location, or if we'd try to get a few units here and there, which is a much more involved process. It's not clear to me what this plan is ultimately promoting. You said the step by step action plan is developed later on, but as a reader, it's frustrating not to see that actual vision taken further, as far as how can the community do a little more in achieving these goals.

**Nipun Jain:** The data shows what kind of housing types we have, where is our strength and what is our weakness, in terms of multi family, single family, rental properties. Also the gap between the 10% and our current subsidized housing inventory. The strategies outline different ways to fill the gap, in the subsidized housing inventory for closing that gap of getting from 7 % to 10 % and also, what various ways can the city think to achieve that objective. There are 5 strategies discussed: 1. through development, 2. through affordable housing preservation and conversion of

market rate homes, 3. regulatory incentives, 4. leverage local capacity, 5. establish policies for affordable housing projects.

Under those 5 umbrellas, there are further subcategories to break down that one strategy under that one umbrella. I agree that keeping the public involved and giving input, as far as which ones are most appropriate for us to do right now. That is a more detailed engaging discussion which involves more stakeholders. This is a document to stakeholders at different levels.

If there are these level of comments, then perhaps we need to move on a more aggressive schedule, perhaps the board can submit to me your comments prior to the meeting, or we can set up a time to discuss these outside of the meeting schedule, so that when we do come to a formal board meeting, we're not discussing all of those every two or four weeks. Your comments are important, but I'd like to keep this moving, getting it to the point where you say," OK, it may not be the perfect document, but it achieves the desired objective, and obvious questions are not left unanswered."

**Karen Solstad:** We have lots of run down cheap apartments. We need more affordable housing, but this doesn't tell me anything. The whole narrative structure of this doesn't tie together. There is no beginning, middle and end.

**Stephen Dunford:** So what is the call? Do we need a detailed special meeting in the next week to discuss this?

**Ted Semesnyei:** What was the timeline? When do you want to get this to municipal council?

**Nipun Jain:** December, last year.

**Ted Semesnyei:** Maybe we need a subcommittee. It sounds like Karen has questions, as I do.

**Stephen Dunford:** It would have to be done within this group. There is no more money to send it out. We have \$1000 to wrap this up, including going to the council meeting for any presentation.

**Nipun Jain:** We don't have access to money or resources at this point, especially a consultant at this time. We can't spin our wheels with this.

**Stephen Dunford:** Could we also suggest that city council sit in on this one, since they might have comments on this also. We could do it together.

**Nipun Jain:** Yes, you guys are the housing committee, so if you believe that you need to engage city council now, for the purposes of this plan. I just don't want this belabored for the next four months. That is my objective.

**Ted Semesnyei:** I feel that if we're labeled as the housing committee, I feel we should be addressing these issues that we have. I wouldn't feel comfortable just saying," Municipal council, this has our approval."

**Nipun Jain:** The consultant has done his thing. Now it is up to us to address it. I have no problem with that. I just need to be cognizant of doing specific actions in order to get where we want to.

**Ted Semesnyei:** I would say, at the beginning, have a better addressing upfront of what the overall purpose of the housing production plan is. If we could just email or have a quick meeting, whoever has specific questions, if we could get those clarified, and maybe just have simple, brief summaries. A better framing upfront would help. Perhaps having a summary of where we are and where it leads.

**Nipun Jain:** If you could get me a highlighted copy, I can address the issues.

**Stephen Dunford:** If you have it in word document, send it to me. If not, send it to me in PDF and I can convert it to word document.

**Minutes** deferred to March 11, 2013. Stephen Dunford will not be present for that meeting, nor will David Dragonas.

**MOTION** to adjourn by Stephen Dunford seconded by David Dragonas. Vote was unanimous.

**Meeting was adjourned at 9:13 P.M.**